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GENETIC COUNSELLING IN SEVERE  
OSTEOGENESIS IMPERFECTA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### VOLUME 1

|                         | PAGE NO.  |    |
|-------------------------|---|----|
| ABSTRACT                | 14  |    |
| SIGNED STATEMENTS       | 17  |    |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS        | 18  |    |
| LIST OF TABLES          | 20  |    |
| LIST OF FIGURES         | 24  |    |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION |   |    |
| 1.1                     | OI is an 'old' disease  | 27 |
| 1.2                     | The problem in brief: genetic counselling in severe sporadic OI | 28 |
| 1.3                     | What is OI?   | 28 |
| 1.4                     | The differential diagnosis of OI                                | 29 |
| 1.4.1                   | Differential diagnosis prenatally and at birth                  | 29 |
| 1.4.1.1                 | Differential diagnosis of short-limbed dwarfism                 | 29 |
| 1.4.1.2                 | OI-like syndromes with additional anomalies presenting at birth | 30 |
| 1.4.2                   | Differential diagnosis in infancy                               | 31 |

|         |  |    |
|---------|--|----|
| 1.4.3   | Differential diagnosis in childhood and adolescence                        | 32 |
| 1.4.4   | Differential diagnosis in adult life                                       | 33 |
| 1.4.5   | Disorders with unusual features which are probably part of the OI spectrum | 33 |
| 1.4.6   | Disorders similar to, but probably distinct from OI                        | 34 |
| 1.4.7   | Coexistence of OI and other connective tissue disorders                    | 35 |
| 1.4.8   | Differential diagnosis of non-skeletal manifestations of OI                | 36 |
| 1.5     | Variability - a hallmark of OI   | 37 |
| 1.6     | OI as a problem of classification - a historical review                    | 37 |
| 1.7     | The Sillence classification  | 40 |
| 1.8     | Limitations of the Sillence classification for genetic counselling         | 43 |
| 1.8.1   | Severe progressively-deforming OI  | 44 |
| 1.8.2   | Perinatally lethal OI  | 46 |
| 1.8.2.1 | Mode of inheritance  | 46 |
| 1.8.2.2 | Overlap of type II with type III OI  | 46 |
| 1.9     | The biochemical basis of OI  | 48 |
| 1.9.1   | Defects in collagen cause OI   | 48 |
| 1.9.2   | The collagen family  | 48 |
| 1.9.3   | Structure and function of type I collagen                                  | 49 |
| 1.9.4   | Biosynthesis of type I collagen  | 50 |
| 1.9.5   | Genes for type I collagen  | 53 |
| 1.9.6   | Clinical correlations of biochemical defects in OI                         | 54 |

|           |   |    |
|-----------|---|----|
| 1.9.6.1   | Autosomal dominant OI - Sillence types I and IV                         | 54 |
| 1.9.6.1.1 | Mutations in the $\alpha 1(I)$ chain                                    | 54 |
| 1.9.6.1.2 | Mutations in the $\alpha 2(I)$ chain                                    | 56 |
| 1.9.6.1.3 | Linkage studies   | 57 |
| 1.9.6.2   | Perinatally lethal OI - Sillence type II                                | 58 |
| 1.9.6.2.1 | Heterozygosity for a deletion in the $\alpha 1(I)$ chain                | 58 |
| 1.9.6.2.2 | Heterozygosity for a substitution in the $\alpha 1(I)$ chain            | 59 |
| 1.9.6.2.3 | Heterozygosity for an insertion in the $\alpha 1(I)$ chain              | 60 |
| 1.9.6.2.4 | Heterozygosity for a deletion in the $\alpha 2(I)$ chain                | 60 |
| 1.9.6.2.5 | Genetic compounds   | 61 |
| 1.9.6.2.6 | Heterozygosity for abnormal $\alpha I$ chains - mutation not identified | 62 |
| 1.9.6.2.7 | Homozygous mutants  | 62 |
| 1.9.6.2.8 | Gonadal mosaicism   | 63 |
| 1.9.6.2.9 | Mouse mutants   | 64 |
| 1.9.6.3.0 | Concluding comment  | 64 |
| 1.9.6.3   | Severe deforming recessive OI - Sillence type III                       | 64 |
| 1.9.6.3.1 | Homozygosity for a deletion in the $\alpha 2(I)$ chain                  | 64 |
| 1.9.6.3.2 | Recessive OI unlinked to COL1A1 or COL1A2                               | 65 |
| 1.9.6.4   | Severe deforming sporadic OI - ?Sillence type III or IV                 | 66 |
| 1.9.6.5   | Does the mutation predict the phenotype?                                | 67 |
| 1.9.6.5.1 | 'Included' and 'excluded' mutants                                       | 67 |

|           |   |    |
|-----------|---|----|
| 1.9.6.5.2 | Mutations in the $\alpha 1(I)$ chain are usually more deleterious than those in $\alpha 2(I)$ | 68 |
| 1.9.6.5.3 | The position of a mutation affects the phenotype  | 68 |

## CHAPTER 2: AIMS OF THE STUDY

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 2.1 | Determination of empirical recurrence risks  | 72 |
| 2.2 | Assessment of prognosis  | 72 |
| 2.3 | Search for factors to distinguish the autosomal recessive cases from true sporadic cases | 72 |
| 2.4 | Clinical assessment of individual cases  | 73 |
| 2.5 | Radiological assessment  | 74 |
| 2.6 | Biochemical analysis   | 74 |

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

|         |  |    |
|---------|--|----|
| 3.1     | Ascertainment of cases   | 76 |
| 3.1.1   | Patients who survived the perinatal period                         | 77 |
| 3.1.2   | Patients who died perinatally                                      | 79 |
| 3.2     | Collection of clinical data  | 80 |
| 3.2.1   | Patients who survived the perinatal period                         | 80 |
| 3.2.1.1 | Families interviewed by the author                                 | 80 |
| 3.2.1.2 | Families who were sent a questionnaire                             | 86 |
| 3.2.1.3 | Families in whom information was provided by a clinical geneticist | 86 |
| 3.2.2   | Patients who died perinatally                                      | 86 |

|         |  |    |
|---------|--|----|
| 3.3     | Collection of radiological data  | 87 |
| 3.3.1   | Patients who survived the perinatal period   | 87 |
| 3.3.2   | Patients who died perinatally  | 89 |
| 3.4     | Analysis of data   | 90 |
| 3.5     | Biochemical analysis   | 90 |
| 3.5.1   | Structural gene analysis and segregation analysis                                  | 90 |
| 3.5.1.1 | Structural gene analysis in perinatally lethal and severe deforming OI             | 91 |
| 3.5.1.2 | Segregation analysis in severe deforming OI  | 93 |
| 3.5.2   | Analysis of collagens produced by cultured skin fibroblasts in severe deforming OI | 94 |
| 3.6     | Follow-up information for patients and their physicians                            | 94 |

#### CHAPTER 4: CLASSIFICATION OF PATIENTS

|         |   |     |
|---------|---|-----|
| 4.1     | Patients who survived the perinatal period  | 95  |
| 4.1.1   | Identification of probable cases of type I OI new mutations   | 95  |
| 4.1.2   | Radiographic appearance in the first week of life   | 96  |
| 4.1.2.1 | Type III/IV OI pattern  | 96  |
| 4.1.2.2 | Type IIB OI pattern   | 100 |
| 4.1.2.3 | The importance of examining radiographs soon after birth for classification of cases of types IIB and III/IV OI | 104 |

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| 4.2   | Patients with perinatally lethal OI                   | 108 |
| 4.2.1 | Type IIA OI   | 108 |
| 4.2.2 | Type IIB OI   | 113 |
| 4.2.3 | Type III/IV OI  | 116 |
| 4.2.4 | Type IIC OI   | 123 |
| 4.2.5 | Unclassifiable perinatally lethal OI                  | 123 |
| 4.3   | Grouping of patients for analysis of recurrence risks | 125 |
| 4.3.1 | Introduction  | 125 |
| 4.3.2 | Type III/IV OI  | 125 |
| 4.3.3 | Type IIB OI   | 126 |

#### CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF RECURRENCE RISKS

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| 5.1   | Introduction                              | 128 |
| 5.2   | Results                                   | 129 |
| 5.2.1 | Number of recurrences in sibs             | 129 |
| 5.2.2 | The sibships                              | 131 |
| 5.2.3 | Maternal miscarriages                     | 133 |
| 5.2.4 | Delays in conceiving                      | 136 |
| 5.2.5 | Parental consanguinity and ethnic origins | 138 |
| 5.2.6 | Parental ages                             | 141 |
| 5.2.7 | Clinical assessment of parents            | 144 |
| 5.2.8 | Clinical assessment of unaffected sibs    | 151 |
| 5.2.9 | The extended family                       | 157 |
| 5.3   | Discussion                                | 159 |

|         |   |     |
|---------|---|-----|
| 5.3.1   | Classification  | 159 |
| 5.3.2   | Recurrence risks and comments upon modes of inheritance | 162 |
| 5.3.2.1 | Type IIA OI   | 162 |
| 5.3.2.2 | Type IIB OI   | 165 |
| 5.3.2.3 | Type IIC OI   | 166 |
| 5.3.2.4 | Unclassifiable perinatally lethal OI                    | 167 |
| 5.3.2.5 | Type III/IV OI  | 167 |
| 5.3.2.6 | Type I OI   | 170 |
| 5.3.3   | Discussion of clinical manifestations in family members | 170 |
| 5.3.3.1 | Parents   | 170 |
| 5.3.3.2 | Sibs  | 173 |
| 5.3.3.3 | The extended families                                   | 174 |



CHAPTER 6: CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CASES

|         |   |     |
|---------|---|-----|
| 6.1     | Total number of cases studied and introductory note                                     | 187 |
| 6.2     | Sex   | 188 |
| 6.3     | Obstetric data  | 188 |
| 6.3.1   | Fetal movements during pregnancy  | 188 |
| 6.3.2   | Prenatal tests  | 191 |
| 6.3.3   | Amniotic fluid volume   | 196 |
| 6.3.4   | Livebirths, stillbirths and terminations  | 198 |
| 6.3.5   | Gestational age   | 200 |
| 6.3.6   | Presentation at delivery  | 203 |
| 6.3.7   | Mode of delivery  | 205 |
| 6.4     | Measurements of babies at birth   | 209 |
| 6.4.1   | Birth weight  | 209 |
| 6.4.2   | Birth length and head circumference   | 214 |
| 6.5     | Survival of liveborn babies: prognosis can be based on radiological appearance at birth | 218 |
| 6.6     | Perinatally lethal cases - description of babies  | 222 |
| 6.7     | Perinatal survivors   | 236 |
| 6.7.1   | Age of patients and cause of death  | 236 |
| 6.7.1.1 | Age of patients alive at the time of the study or at death                              | 236 |
| 6.7.1.2 | Cause of death in liveborn patients with types IIB, III/IV and III OI                   | 239 |
| 6.7.2   | The skeleton  | 242 |

|           |  |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
| 6.7.2.1   | Fractures  | 242 |
| 6.7.2.1.1 | Fractures at birth                                 | 242 |
| 6.7.2.1.2 | Fractures occurring after birth                    | 246 |
| 6.7.2.2   | Skeletal deformity evident on clinical examination | 252 |
| 6.7.2.3   | Height and head circumference                      | 269 |
| 6.7.3     | Handicap   | 273 |
| 6.7.4     | The eye  | 277 |
| 6.7.4.1   | Scleral colour                                     | 277 |
| 6.7.4.2   | Visual defects and strabismus                      | 289 |
| 6.7.5     | The joints   | 294 |
| 6.7.5.1   | Joint hyperextensibility                           | 294 |
| 6.7.5.2   | Joint dislocations                                 | 302 |
| 6.7.6     | The skin   | 305 |
| 6.7.6.1   | Skin hyperextensibility                            | 305 |
| 6.7.6.2   | Bruising tendency and epistaxes                    | 308 |
| 6.7.6.3   | Excessive sweating                                 | 312 |
| 6.7.7     | The ear - hearing loss                             | 315 |
| 6.7.8     | The teeth - dentinogenesis imperfecta              | 321 |
| 6.7.9     | The gastrointestinal tract                         | 327 |
| 6.7.9.1   | Constipation                                       | 327 |
| 6.7.9.2   | Herniae  | 330 |
| 6.7.10    | The heart  | 332 |
| 6.7.11    | General observations                               | 335 |
| 6.7.11.1  | Intelligence and personality                       | 335 |
| 6.7.11.2  | Menarche and pregnancy                             | 336 |
| 6.7.11.3  | The voice  | 337 |

|          |   |     |
|----------|---|-----|
| 6.7.11.4 | Nail growth   | 339 |
| 6.7.12   | Other abnormalities   | 339 |
| 6.8      | Concluding remarks: comparison of type III/IV OI with types III and I | 342 |

## CHAPTER 7: POSTNATAL RADIOLOGICAL MANIFESTATIONS

|       |  |     |
|-------|--|-----|
| 7.1   | Introduction   | 345 |
| 7.2   | General observations                                     | 346 |
| 7.3   | Long bones   | 348 |
| 7.4   | Chest  | 357 |
| 7.4.1 | Chest - general  | 357 |
| 7.4.2 | Downward angulation of the ribs                          | 361 |
| 7.5   | Pelvis   | 364 |
| 7.6   | Spine  | 366 |
| 7.6.1 | Kyphosis, platyspondyly, scoliosis and other deformities | 366 |
| 7.6.2 | Elongation of the pedicles                               | 375 |
| 7.7   | Skull  | 378 |
| 7.8   | Miscellaneous skeletal abnormalities                     | 384 |
| 7.8.1 | Pseudoarthroses  | 384 |
| 7.8.2 | Hyperplastic callus                                      | 388 |
| 7.8.3 | Cross-fusion of paired bones                             | 390 |
| 7.8.4 | Joint dislocation  | 390 |
| 7.8.5 | Other  | 391 |
|       | POSTSCRIPT   | 392 |

## APPENDICES

|              |   |     |
|--------------|---|-----|
| 1.1          | Milestones in the history of OI and some synonyms   | 394 |
| 3.1          | Protocol for interviewing the patients  | 397 |
| 3.2          | Colour chart used to determine the colour of sclerae  | 400 |
| 3.3          | Questionnaire sent by post to geographically inaccessible families                            | 401 |
| 3.4          | Form for recording radiological data in perinatal survivors                                   | 403 |
| 5.1          | Family data   | 404 |
| 5.2          | Clinical manifestations in parents  | 413 |
| 6.1          | Clinical data on cases  | 415 |
| 6.2          | Method of assessment of sex ratios  | 446 |
| 6.3          | Joint dislocations  | 447 |
| 6.4          | Types of herniae and outcome in perinatal survivors   | 448 |
| 7.1          | Postnatal radiological manifestations   | 450 |
| 7.2          | Comparison of radiological manifestations with scleral colour in patients with type III/IV OI | 454 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY |   | 457 |

## ABSTRACT

Osteogenesis imperfecta (OI) is a heterogeneous group of disorders of connective tissue which principally manifest as osteoporosis and bone fragility. It is likely that monogenic defects of collagen underlie these conditions.

The present study addresses the problem of giving genetic counselling to parents of a 'sporadic' case of severe OI, either of the perinatally lethal or severe deforming variety. Such cases are likely to represent either fresh dominant mutations with no recurrence risk to sibs or autosomal recessive inheritance, with a 25% recurrence risk. Occasionally, parental gonadal mosaicism for a dominant mutation may also account for recurrences in sibs.

The main existing clinical and genetic classification of OI by David Sillence and his colleagues is extremely useful, but has limitations, due to heterogeneity within types and clinical overlap between types. Severe progressively deforming OI can be autosomal recessively inherited (Sillence type III) or autosomal dominantly determined (Sillence type IV); sporadic cases cannot be precisely allocated to either type. The present study overcomes this dilemma by pooling together a type III/IV group and determining the empirical recurrence risk to sibs. This is 4.4% (6 affected sibs out of 135 sibs of 104 cases). In these families, the parents are unrelated. In an additional 4 families, the parents are consanguineous and as there is other

evidence for autosomal recessive inheritance in these families, their disease is presumed to be recessively determined.

A source of confusion between the perinatally lethal (Sillence type II) and the severe deforming (Sillence type III/IV) categories is that the time of death may overlap. The present study suggests that a solution to this dilemma is to classify cases radiologically (rather than by time of death), as soon after birth as possible. In addition, the degree of radiological abnormality at birth can predict the prognosis, to some extent.

Originally, Sillence and his colleagues suggested that all 3 perinatally lethal types (IIA, IIB and IIC) were autosomal recessively inherited. The recurrences in sibs in the type II groups in the present series are: type IIA, no recurrences in the 38 sibs of 30 cases; type IIB, one affected sib of 13 sibs of 15 cases; type IIC, no affected sibs of the 3 sibs of 3 cases. For the type IIA group, the data support the suggestion of other authors that the majority of cases arise by new dominant mutations, and so the risk of recurrence to sibs is small. The occasional reports of sib recurrences probably can be attributed to parental germinal mosaicism. The present data and other evidence for types IIB and IIC OI means that autosomal recessive inheritance still cannot be ruled out.

Detailed clinical, radiological and family data are included in order to demonstrate the manifestations in the various types of OI to which the recurrence risk figures apply. No reliable

distinguishing features between the sporadic and familial cases of severe deforming OI (type III/IV) are found. It is not possible to pinpoint parents as being heterozygotes for recessive forms of OI on clinical grounds.

The outcome of collaborations with colleagues in molecular genetics and biochemistry are described.